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“But we...”

“Look: You don’t need it, there’s hardly any of you left.” The Kobald leisurely extended an arm and clasped Tarak’s goblet of ale. He drew it to his lips and sipped at it casually. From the expression on his gritty face, he appeared to be pleased with the taste. “We’ve gotten tired of living in caverns, sleeping on rocks. We’d like to fill in some of your vacant lodgings.”

“You want to live with us?”

“Why not? We’d like to learn more about how you built this place.” The Kobald smiled, its crimson eyes narrowing into narrow slits. “It would be fair compensation for what your ancestors did to mine, don’t you think?”

“I suppose...” Tarak gradually lowered his dagger. Urik, standing beside him, scratched his head.

“Maybe we could even help you get some of your equipment working again – seems like things have started to fall apart around here.”

“Maybe...”

“I know all this is rather sudden – and I’m sure you need to discuss things with your

governing council.” The Kobald stood, bowing in respect. “We will take our leave now, and we will give you some time to think things over.”

“Fine...”

“Our attaché will be in contact with you to negotiate a settlement.” Moving at a snail’s pace, the band of Kobalds filed back into the corridor. “It’s been a pleasure meeting you.”

Moments later, Tarak and Urik still stood shaking on the long table beneath the vast painting in the middle of the Great Hall of Ahkurst. The other Elders had apparently scattered throughout the network of tunnels, and probably cowered in the shadows awaiting gruesome and violent deaths.

Tarak sheathed his dagger and sat down on the edge of the table.

“So much for the glory of battle,” Tarak mused.

“It’s a strange, new world,” Urik admitted, sitting down beside his friend. “Do you think the dragons have ambassadors and mediators, too?”

<End>

ABOUT OUR CONTRIBUTORS

L.C. Atencio holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Creative Writing from the University of Central Florida, with scholarly emphasis on illustrating literary works. Atencio’s poems, “Believing in words, not in whoever,” and “Staring through the cracks of reality,” were published in 2012 in *Nota Bene*, an anthology by The Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society. He has edited and judged college journals such as *Phoenix Magazine*, *The Cypress Dome*, and *The Florida Review*. His poetry and short stories have been published internationally in *Westview*, *Perspectives*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *The Penwood Review*, *The Storyteller*, *Space and Time Magazine*, *Grey Sparrow Press* and others. His illustrations have been featured in college magazines such as *Aries: A Journal of Art and Literature*. Atencio is proud to be an experimental novelist for the everyday person, and a book illustrator. To get in touch, he may be contacted at <http://creativewriter0.wix.com/lcatencio>.

Georgia Ann Banks-Martin, MFA, is best known as a poet and the editor of *New Mirage Journal*. She has led workshops for the Jane's Stories Press Foundation and the Writers International Network Zimbabwe. She has read her work at various conferences, such as Writing By Degrees and Association of Writers and Writing Programs, and other national locales. Her work appears in both magazines and anthologies. Some of her poems have been translated into Farsi by the Persian writer and translator Farideh Hassanzadeh-Mostafavi. Banks-Martin's most recent collection, *Rhapsody for Lessons Learned or Remembered*, is best described as experimental, in the sense that the poems blend memoir with historical fact and ekphrastic technique to explore the overall theme of the rediscovery of self and establishment of self within the greater fabric of the human experience. If you would like to learn more about the writer, please visit her webpage: georgiabanks-martin.com.

Gania Barlow teaches literature at Oakland University in Michigan. Her research focuses on the literature of medieval England, but she also finds herself inspired to read, teach, and write poems about stories from many other times and places. She has published both creative and scholarly work, in journals including *Agni*, *The Chaucer Review*, *Fourteen Hills*, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, and *Smokelong Quarterly*.

Myles Buchanan grew up in Portland, Oregon, and is an aspiring fantasy writer, currently working on a collection of linked stories called *Sorrowlands*. He is a lifelong fan of J.R.R. Tolkien and Lord Dunsany and has a particular interest in the treatment of forests in fantasy literature. He earned his B.A. in English at Kenyon College and is currently pursuing a Master in Fine Arts in Creative Writing at Eastern Washington University.

Gwenyth Hood was born in White Plains, NY, but moved with her family to Brandon, Vermont at the age of seven. She developed a love of reading and writing at an early age, discovering some favorite authors—Rudyard Kipling, Shakespeare, and J. R. R. Tolkien—at roughly the same time, in early adolescence. In 1982, her first novel, *The Coming of the Demons*, was published by William Morrow. She has been the editor of *The Mythic Circle* all the years of this millennium and a few more. She teaches English at Marshall University and is trying to market her Science Fiction trilogy, *Exiles from Distant Stars*, which she recently finished.

Emily Metcalf is a visual artist born and raised in Honolulu, Hawaii, and currently living in Indiana. She holds a BA in Drawing & Painting and Graphic Design. A voracious childhood reader, Emily grew up visualizing and drawing the scenes from her favorite books. Today, she views creativity as part of humanity's essential nature, and as a way to reflect the love of God. Emily works in watercolor, pen and ink, photography, and digital media.

Ryder W. Miller is an eco-critic, critic, poet, writer, and journalist. He is regular contributor to *The Mythic Circle*, *Beyond Bree*, and *Mythprint*. He has also published stories at *The Lost Souls* website. He is the author of *Tales of Suspense and Horror*, co-author of *San Francisco: A Natural History*, and editor of *From Narnia to a Space Odyssey*.

He is currently looking for a publisher for a collection of stories titled: *Tales of Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*.

Chelsi Robichaud is a 23-year-old graduate student writing and residing in Ottawa, Ontario. Her work has appeared in *Transition*, *Mythic Circle*, *The Copperfield Review*, and *The Commonline Journal*. She is currently working on a comic book that focuses on women's issues.

William H. Wandless is a professor of English at Central Michigan University, where he teaches and writes about eighteenth-century fiction, modern genre fiction, and American popular culture. His own speculative fiction has appeared in *Dark Realms*, *Realms of Fantasy*, *Supernatural Tales*, and several other journals.

Charlie W. Starr is a sometime writer, teacher, and minister as well as a full time husband, father and now grandfather. Charlie enjoys caving, reading, writing, movies and television and all things C. S. Lewis. He and his wife Becky have been married for 31 years; they have two grown children and a five pound dog named Phydeaux.

Marly Youmans is the award-winning author of thirteen books of poetry and fiction. Her most recent novels are *Maze of Blood*, a story inspired by the life of Robert E. Howard, and *Glimmerglass*, a transformation tale about a painter who believes she has seen the Muse in the woods near her home (Mercer.) Her most recent books of poetry are a collection, *The Foliate Head* (UK: Stanza Press) and a post-apocalyptic adventure in blank verse, *Thaliad* (Montreal: Phoenicia Publishing.) "After the Black Chrysalis," while aiming at a very human passage through darkness and transformation, makes use of the blackening pupa of the monarch and the changeability of the morpho, as well as the riot of color and form that belongs to the order of butterflies, long linked to the soul. The poem is part of a manuscript called *Rave*, its poems begun as a response to Yoruban praise poems.
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Lee Clark Zumpe has been writing and publishing horror, dark fantasy and speculative fiction since the late 1990s. His short stories and poetry have appeared in a variety of publications such as *Weird Tales*, *Space and Time* and *Dark Wisdom*; and in anthologies such as *Corpse Blossoms*, *Best New Zombie Tales Vol. 3*, *Steampunk Cthulhu* and *World War Cthulhu*. His work has earned several honorable mentions in The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror collections.

An entertainment columnist with Tampa Bay Newspapers, Lee has penned hundreds of film, theater and book reviews and has interviewed novelists as well as music industry icons such as Paddy Moloney of The Chieftains and Alan Parsons. His work for TBN has been recognized repeatedly by the Florida Press Association, including a first place award for criticism in the 2013 Better Weekly Newspaper Contest.

Lee lives on the west coast of Florida with his wife and daughter. Visit <http://www.leeclarkzumpe.com/>.